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# EMPOWERED LEARNER

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## UNLEASHING EVERY GENIUS

CREATIVE GENIUS ISN'T RARE - BUT THE  
CONDITIONS THAT NURTURE IT ARE



### TOTAL TURNAROUND

HOW LAUSD'S TROUBLED  
ROLLOUT BECAME A MODEL  
FOR TECH SUCCESS

### STANDARDS SPOTLIGHT

TAKE STEPS TO EMBRACE  
THE LEARNER STANDARD



# TOTAL TURNAROUND

How LAUSD's troubled rollout  
became a model for tech success

By Jennifer Snelling



SPREAD ACROSS 720 SQUARE MILES and comprised of 1,302 schools, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) – one of the largest districts in the nation – covers a diverse landscape where 76 percent of students receive free and reduced-price lunch. In 2013, the district embarked on an ambitious initiative to use technology to close achievement gaps. The Common Core Technology Project, which proposed giving students tablet computers equipped with digital curriculum, cost nearly \$1.3 billion for the purchase of networking equipment and 650,000 devices loaded with educational software.

What looked to be a giant leap into the digital age ended with a series of high-profile resignations and a stream of negative headlines. The Los Angeles Times labeled the project, “ill-conceived and half-baked.”

What went wrong? Internet connectivity didn’t work well at some schools, teachers were not well trained on how to use the tablets, software had been sold even though it was still under development and students were able to bypass security features. In short, the district had purchased a lot of expensive new tools without a clear plan for how to use them.

Fast forward to 2018 and LAUSD has become a model for how to integrate technology while leading with instruction. What was one of the tools that helped lead the district out of the darkness? The ISTE Standards, which didn’t solve the district’s connectivity problems, for example, but were very helpful in guiding the reboot.

ISTE CEO Richard Culatta, who provided guidance to LAUSD while serving as the director of the Office of Educational Technology for the U.S. Department of Education, says LAUSD achieved a successful turnaround by putting technology in service of the learning community. “By hitting the reset button and putting a focus on preparing and supporting teachers, shifting learning back into the driver’s seat, they were able to turn an ugly situation into an example for others to follow,” Culatta says.

## Learning and immersing

The Common Core Technology Project ended in 2014 when the district canceled the contract and the superintendent overseeing the initiative resigned. In 2015, then-superintendent Ramon Cortines formed the Instructional Technology Initiative (ITI) task force charged with developing a districtwide strategy for providing students and teachers with the technology they need to succeed.

Asked to head up the effort was Frances Gipson, Ph.D., then superintendent on the east side of Los Angeles. Gipson initially balked at the idea because she was not a technologist.

Cortines replied, “No, you’re an instructional leader and that’s what this is all about.”

The task force, made up of 60 representatives from all district stakeholders, including teachers, parents, administrators and special education, met every Thursday for two years. Gipson asked the group to be learners instead of advocates and immerse themselves in the process of learning about best practices around instructional technology.

## Collaborating with ISTE

A turning point came in spring of 2016, while ISTE was in the midst of a refresh of the ISTE Standards for Students that involved over 2,700 people from 52 countries, including students and the LAUSD Task Force. During the process, the task force realized it had found an exact alignment with its own ideals around leading with instruction, personalized learning and equity, says Sophia Mendoza, director of ITI’s instruction division.

“The ISTE Standards for Students are a set of competencies for students to be successful in a digital world,” says Culatta. “The whole team of educators and students who were involved in the refresh identified the critical skills required for a world that’s very different than the one most of us grew up in. The standards provide a pathway to create global citizens who will live in a world where all their work, much of their civic engagement and a huge part of their personal experiences are going to happen in digital spaces.”

The task force realized the ISTE Standards were a good match after a videoconference with Carolyn Sykora, senior director of ISTE Standards, says Vanessa Monterosa, Ed.D., ITI’s specialist of program and policy development. “We aligned our conversations to the standards after that because [the standards] gave us the vocabulary we



LAUSD PHOTOS COURTESY OF LAUSD DIVISION OF INSTRUCTION

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needed to move forward and helped us put a name to the process of instructional transformation we were pursuing,” Monterosa says.

The task force’s recommendations, released in June 2016, proposed a paradigm shift in instruction. “Effective instruction necessitates technology. If educators are not leveraging technology, how will students be best prepared for today’s increasingly digital world?” read the recommendations. “Personalized learning cannot occur in the district’s current instructional model unless educators begin leveraging the many opportunities afforded by digital tools to promote learner agency and academic rigor.”

### It’s like water

Gipson, who became LAUSD’s chief academic officer during the process, says the ISTE Standards are now woven throughout each and every content area instead of being add-ons to already existing standards. “[The standards] are not just a one-time project, program or event. It’s like breathing – a continual, simultaneous exercise that is both simply elegant and complex,” she says. “It’s about leading with instruction, instead of leading with a tool.”

Allison Jonas, specialist, instructional leadership support, agrees that the ISTE Standards have been a natural fit since they are aligned to California’s state content standards. Jonas says her job is to help make those connections with teachers and provide professional development that is not *in addition* to other standards, but *in connection with* other national or state standards.

A favorite line of Gipson’s, “Be a model, not a critic,” has proven vital to the implementation of the standards. “We wanted to ensure that we practice what we preach in the area of personalized learning, meeting the learner where they’re at. And by learner, we mean all learners – from students to teachers to district leaders. We needed to have various entry points on the continuum of learning for all to feel that this is work they can pursue regardless of their technology skills,” says Sophia Mendoza, director of ITI.

The ITI provides six models of support:

**Interdepartment cross-stitching or collaboration.** ITI and the ISTE Standards are at the table each time a content team is developing a program of support for all schools. The focus is on



consistent messaging around use of the ISTE Standards and supporting each department.

**Instructional leadership cohorts.** Cohorts made up of a principal and leadership team attend a three-day institute style program that begins with identifying a vision for instruction. The cohorts demonstrate that digital age instruction should not be a separate parallel track, but integrated into every subject and classroom. Jonas describes these sessions as an “opportunity to start focusing on instructional practices, leveraging digital tools and demystifying technology as the focal point in the classroom.”

Digital Citizen is an example of a standard the cohort focused on visualizing, changing the focus from avoiding all the scary stuff online to how to create a digital profile for life success.

ITI has already surpassed this year’s goal to increase by 40 leadership teams and now has teams at more than 100 schools.

**ISTE Standards for Students suite.** ITI takes a deep dive into the standards by providing a four-hour session covering one standard at a time. Staff is divided into groups and asked to reflect on what each standard looks like and how to apply it in the school. The idea is that each teacher walks away with an idea they can immediately implement in the classroom.

**Practitioner schools.** Twenty-three schools have participated in the Practitioner School Program that uses a distributed leadership model to work on task force recommendations and create an instructional technology plan. “The schools all had this growth mindset around wanting to ensure that the ISTE Standards for Students and task force recommendations were part of their instructional design,” says Jonas.

There’s an instructional technology facilitator integrated into each Practitioner School to support personalized learning efforts.

**Teacher Leader Network.** Teachers apply to participate in 10 after-school or Saturday sessions of the Teacher Leader Network. Each session builds on the other and teachers are asked to implement an idea in the classroom between sessions, then bring the results to the next session for discussion. The sessions are focused either on an individual ISTE Standard or computer science.

**Exemplars.** Exemplars, set to launch early this year, will work closely with a school site to showcase or profile a specific practice, ISTE standard or other instructional practice leveraged to amplify a lesson.

Looking ahead, LAUSD is integrating computer science classes throughout K-8, pursuing computation thinking as a literacy for all. And due to the district’s past involvement in refreshes of the ISTE Standards for Students, Educators and Administrators, ISTE expects LAUSD will be at the table as it updates the computer science standards, slated for release later this year.



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### Lighting a match

All this professional development is aimed at getting the ISTE Standards into each and every classroom in the district. Luis Torres, a third grade teacher who became an instructional coach this school year, says he sees the power of the shift every day, whether in student conversations on the playground or smiles in the classrooms.

The traditional second grade project that involves researching animals and habitats has expanded and deepened traditional learning through the application of the Creative Communicator standard. Students now have access to research links and can generate their own questions and work together to answer them. Teachers then help students put that information into Google Slides they can present to their peers and other classes.

“That’s the empowering part, being able to share their work over distance and time,” says Torres. “That’s something you couldn’t do without the technology.”

The students that Torres works with in south Los Angeles include many English language learners. He says the technology helps teachers and students transcend the language barrier, allowing

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students agency over their own education. “Students in the classroom are smiling and the learning is not being forced. It’s coming from within the student and that’s very powerful,” he says. “It’s lighting a match that will never go out.”

### Ripple effect

LAUSD is not the only place where the ISTE Standards for Students are being implemented. Districts in Wisconsin, Michigan, New Jersey, Washington as well as the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) are also using the standards.

The Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology (CCET), which oversees 169 school districts, has endorsed the new Student Standards and the Educator Standards, making it the first state to do so in both cases.

As with LAUSD, Connecticut sees the ISTE Standards as complements to existing frameworks within the state education system such as the Common Core, National Council for Accreditation for Teacher Education (NCATE) and the American Association of School Librarians (AASL).

Implementing the standards in every classroom around the state is the challenge. To that end, Connecticut will focus on teacher preparation, encouraging district accreditation bodies to make the ISTE Standards part of their assessment rubrics, creating a resource library and other initiatives.

ISTE member Barbara Johnson, library media specialist at Jack Jackter Intermediate School in Colchester, Connecticut, came up with the idea of crowdsourcing resources using #trythisonmonday as a way for teachers to post simple methods for implementing the standards on social media so that they could be used in the coming week.

The Vermont State Board of Education has also voted to adopt the ISTE Standards for Students. State Board of Education Chair Krista Huling says, “The ISTE Standards for Students will help assist all educators in the goal of how to deliver and assess progress through various academic areas. These standards also strengthen Vermont’s commitment to citizenship in the digital age at a time when civic engagement at all levels are key to strengthening our democracy.”

### Share the learning

Through social media, cohorts and exemplars, the aspiration to lead with instruction is taking hold in classrooms the world over. Monterosa says the practices are being amplified throughout the district.

LAUSD presented at ISTE 2017 and is working with the New York Department of Education to share what it learned throughout its adoption and implementation experience. ISTE networks and coaches provide guidance and sources of information. When the new Student Standards were released, ISTE also provided an implementation toolkit, an e-book and other online resources.



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“Our recommendations talk about personalized learning and the way the standards reflect learner driven practices,” Monterosa says. “Our school leaders can see the ISTE Standards implemented throughout our professional development, our policies, the way in which our team cross-stitches with other departments where we center conversations around instruction, around students, around their learning. We’re seeing a ripple effect.”

And in Connecticut, the standards are expected to ripple into the future.

“We see the ISTE Standards as masterful personas that define how students and teachers should use technology to support learning,” says Doug Casey, executive director of CCET. “They strike just the right balance between descriptive and prescriptive, making them relevant for years to come.”

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JENNIFER SNELLING IS A FREELANCER WHO WRITES FOR A VARIETY OF PUBLICATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING THE UNIVERSITY OF OREGON. AS A MOTHER TO ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN, SHE'S A FREQUENT CLASSROOM VOLUNTEER AND IS ACTIVE IN OREGON SCHOOLS.



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